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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 003515

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SUBJECT: TFLE01: SYRIA DAILY SITREP 03 FOR WEDNESDAY, JULY 19, 2006

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4 b/d

11. (C) Summary: A Russian envoy and the EU's foreign policy chief are expected to make separate visits to Syria, perhaps as early as July 20, and the SARG may reverse its refusal to receive UN Special Envoy Terje Roed-Larsen, according to a media contact. The Ba'ath Party's highest policy-making body held its second meeting in two days on July 19, repeating its support for the resistance of Israeli aggression, according to Syria's official news agency. On July 18, more than 47,000 people crossed from Lebanon into Syria, including about 7,000 non-Arab foreigners, according to Syrian immigration officials who spoke to local media. American Citizen Service (ACS) calls slowed slightly July 18, but 200 walk-in Americans requested assistance. The Charge has limited TDY travel to Damascus to mission-critical personnel.
End Summary.

POLITICAL/MILITARY

12. (C) The following are political/military updates:

-- Russian Deputy FM and Middle East Envoy Alexander Saltanov and EU Foreign Policy chief Javier Solana are expected to make separate visits Syria, perhaps as early as July 20, according to the BBC's Damascus-based correspondent Assaf Aboud. Additionally, the SARG may reverse its refusal to receive UN Special Envoy Terje Roed-Larsen, who may now come as part of a larger UN delegation, according to Aboud, who did not specify a date for the visit. (Comment: The SARG will welcome Saltanov and Solana as a sign of regime success at cracking the international isolation of Syria. The regime will be less happy to see Roed-Larsen, who is charged with the implementation of UNSCR 1559.)

-- Italy's PM Romano Prodi has made several calls to Syrian President Bashar al-Asad, urging Syria to join a dialogue to defuse the escalation of the Israeli-Hizballah conflict, according an Associated Press report of comments by Italian FM Massimo D'Alema. The Italian FM urged Europe to take a united front on the Middle East, commenting that, "We have seen how divisions have hurt the EU's influence in foreign policy," the AP reported.

-- The Ba'ath Party's highest policy-making body, the Regional Command, held its second meeting in two days on July 19, repeating its support for "the resistance" in Lebanon (i.e. Hizballah), according to the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA). The Command also called on the government to provide complete assistance to displaced Lebanese, SANA reported. Local and regional media are reporting a range of

efforts to assist Lebanon, including the opening of Damascus University dormitories and five schools as temporary housing for displaced Lebanese, welcome centers on the Syrian side of the Lebanon-Syria border and the provision of government buses to Damascus, hotlines to coordinate assistance to displaced persons, and Syrian civilian aid convoys to Lebanon.

-- Syria's Ambassador to the Arab League said that his country would not attend an extraordinary summit over Israel's offensive in Lebanon because it is expected to ignore "the danger that is surrounding the nation," but that Syria would be the first country to attend such a meeting if it supported "Arab Nation's resistance," according to a SANA report.

-- The Charge has limited TDY travel to Damascus to mission-critical personnel, who must receive written permission to travel to Syria. This policy will remain in effect at least through the end of July.

CONSULAR

13. (U) The following are consular updates:

-- About 135,000 displaced persons have fled Lebanon into Syria since the start of Israeli attacks, according to a report in the Syrian Champress news agency, which quoted Syrian immigration and passport officials. On July 18, more than 47,000 people crossed into Syria, including about 12,600 Lebanese, 20,800 Syrian citizens, 6,700 Arab citizens, and 7,000 other foreigners, according to the Champress report. (Comment: It is impossible to determine the number of Americans crossing from Lebanon into Syria, as dual nationals

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are likely to use their non-U.S. travel documents to enter the country. Arabs do not need a visa to enter Syria.)

-- American Citizen Service (ACS) calls slowed slightly July 18, but 200 walk-in Americans requested assistance, up from 72 persons on July 17 and 120 on July 16.

-- A consular officer was dispatched July 19 to the Lebanon side of the no-man's-land separating the Syria-Lebanon border at the Jdeideh crossing to retrieve an American family without U.S. passports. A similar attempt to assist the same family on the previous day failed when the family fled Israeli bombing in the area. Charge raised the matter July 19 with the SARG MFA's Director of Protocol who promised border facilitation for the family's passage into Syria.

-- While no payment will be required of U.S. citizens evacuated from Lebanon, Embassy Damascus was still verifying if that policy would be extended to U.S. citizens who have fled Lebanon to Syria and were seeking evacuation.

ECONOMIC/COMMERCIAL

14. (SBU) The following are economic/commercial updates:

-- The Syria-based SYG of the Higher Syrian-Lebanese Council, Nasri al-Khoury, said that Syria had increased the power supply by 40 megawatts to Lebanon in compensation for the destruction of power plants by Israel, and that Syria was considering the resupply of Lebanon with gasoline, according to media reports.

-- Syria's three international airports were operation at capacity, according to the MFA's protocol director.

-- A Serbian diplomat in Damascus said his Embassy was facing a cash shortage after Israeli bombing of Lebanese roads near the Syrian border. The bombing forced the closure of many shops and bank branches in the Lebanese border city of Chtaura, including the branch of the Arab Bank where Serbian Embassy in Damascus had conducted its banking, said the

diplomat who added that his Embassy would probably transfer its business to an Arab Bank branch in Jordan. (Comment: Post expects that other Damascus-based embassies will face similar problems, particularly since the imposition of the 311 sanctions caused an increasing number of diplomatic missions here to transfer banking operations to Lebanon because their traditional European banks stopped doing business in Syria.) As an aside, the Deutsche Presse Agency reported July 18 that Israeli jets bombed the Lebanon side of the Beirut-Damascus highway, cutting off a main route used by those fleeing Lebanon.

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